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COMMON BARN-OWLS FROM CAPTIVE PROPAGATION FOUND NESTING IN THE WILD

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The Common Barn-Owl (*Tyto alba*) is an endangered species in Missouri and much of the Midwest. Dwindling Midwestern barn-owl populations have been linked to loss of foraging habitat, lack of available nest sites, winter mortality, and predation by Great Horned Owls (*Bubo virginianus*) (Colvin, *J. Field Ornith.* 56(3):224-235, 1985; Marti, *Condor* 87(1):111-115, 1985). In an effort to restore barn-owl populations, Missouri has been involved in a barn-owl captive breeding and reintroduction project.

From 1983-85 the Raptor Rehabilitation and Propagation Project, Inc. (RRPP) and the Missouri Department of Conservation reintroduced 157 captive-reared barn-owls into St. Charles County, Missouri. The release area centered around a 400 ha riverine marsh (Marais Temps Clair Wildlife Area) which is surrounded by Missouri and Mississippi River agricultural bottomland. All reintroduced barn-owls were banded with USFWS aluminum lock-on leg bands. Beginning in 1985, seamless USFWS leg bands were also placed on all captive reared barn-owls at the RRPP. A search of the study area was conducted from 1 March to 1 August 1985 and 1986 to determine the nesting success of reintroduced barn-owls.

Three barn-owl nests were discovered in St. Charles County during 1985. Photographs of nesting pairs confirmed that both parents of one nest site wore USFWS lock-on leg bands. A two m long wooden trough served as a nesting structure for the banded pair. Three chicks hatched and fledged from this nest. Band numbers on the trough site pair could not be read from the photographs and the pair was not captured. Mobility of barn-owls and the occasional banding of wild birds preclude a firm conclusion that this banded nesting pair was captive-propagated (C. Marti, pers. comm.). However, an adult female barn-owl was found dead below the trough nest site during the last week of the nestling period. The band number revealed that she had been born in captivity at the RRPP and released in May 1984 in a barn 200 m south of the recovery site.

During the summer of 1986, three barn-owl nests were discovered in St. Charles County. A pair of barn-owls utilizing a nest box was captured. The male was banded

and had been born in captivity at the RRPP and released in May 1985 seven km south of where it was found. The male was 13 mo old at the time of the nesting. Of the five eggs laid four chicks hatched and fledged. Two 1985 captive-propagated and reintroduced barn-owls were captured from an airplane tail section during January and February of 1986. No eggs were present at the time of the captures. In July 1986 seamless and lock-on leg bands were visually confirmed for both parents of a nest in the plane tail section by the use of 7 × 35 binoculars. Three barn-owl chicks were present in the airplane nest site at the time of the banding confirmation. The parents could not be captured and it could not be determined whether these were the same owls captured in January and February.

We could find no published accounts which document successful breeding in the wild by captive-propagated barn-owls. Marti and Wagner (*Raptor Res.* 14(1):61-62, 1980) fostered a young male barn-owl to a wild nest and discovered it nesting in the wild one yr later. They also reported a "tame" female barn-owl, not born in captivity but raised in captivity, later forming a pair bond in the wild (C. Marti, pers. comm.). Although limited, these results suggest that barn-owls born in captivity and released in suitable habitat can survive and breed in the wild.

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